

Ahaveth Chesed Synagogue
Oriental Greek Orthodox Church
723 Laura Street
Jacksonville
Duval County
Florida

HABS No. FL-350

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Historic American Buildings Survey
National Park Service
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HISTORIC AMERICAN BUILDINGS SURVEY

AHAVETH CHESED SYNAGOGUE

HABS No. FL-350

(ORIENTAL GREEK ORTHODOX CHURCH.)

Location: 723 Laura Street, northeast corner of Laura and Union Streets, Jacksonville, Florida.

USGS Jacksonville Quadrangle, Universal Transverse Mercator Coordinates: 17.436780.335590.

Present Owner: The Oriental Greek Orthodox Church, The Revelation of St. John-Theologou.
3850 Atlantic Boulevard, Jacksonville, Florida.

Present Occupant: The Metropolitan Community Church.

Present Use: Sanctuary.

Significance: On the original site of Jacksonville's oldest Jewish Congregation's synogogue, this sanctuary was the first house of worship to be rebuilt downtown after the fire of 1901 and is a unique blend of near Eastern and Greek Revival styles.

PART I. HISTORICAL INFORMATION

A. Physical History:

1. Date of erection: According to Jacksonville's historian T. Frederick Davis, immediately after the fire of May 3, 1901, plans were laid for rebuilding the synogogue of the Congregation Ahaveth Chesed on the site of their first temple, erected in 1882 (Davis, p. 410). The corner stone of the new structure was laid on November 18, 1901; it was completed and occupied on January 20, 1902 (Davis, pp. 410-11).
2. Architect: None known.
3. Original and subsequent owners: The sanctuary lies on land originally owned by I. D. Hart, the "founder" of Jacksonville, which is known as the north 48 1/2 feet of Lot S. Block 82, or Hart's Map of Jacksonville. The Congregation Ahaveth Chesed acquired the property in 1882, as thus recorded:

1882 Warranty Deed, April 6, 1882, recorded April 7, 1882,
Archibald # AI 426; passed from

Hebrew Benevolent Society by Jacob Huff, president

to

The Ahaveth Chesed Hebrew Congregation

1908 Warranty Deed, January 31, 1908, recorded January 31, 1908,
 in Hart's Map plat book, liber 45 folio 454; passed from

 Ahaveth Chesed Hebrew Congregation by I.L. Moses, president.

to

The First Church of Christ Scientist of Jacksonville

1919 Warranty Deed, April 25, 1919, recorded May 7, 1919, liber
 181 folio 683; passed from

The First Church of Christ Scientist

to

The Oriental Greek Orthodox Church, The Revelation of St.
John-Theologou, of Jacksonville.

4. Original plans, construction, etc.: There are no original construction records available for this building.
5. Additions and alterations: The pendants surmounting the wooden "onion dome" tower were removed after 1905. The shallow niche in the center of the east wall appears to have been altered into a pointed arch fresco inset, presumably by the Greek Orthodox congregation. (Slappey interview)

In 1935 a brick Sunday School addition was made to the east end of the building. The Building and Zoning Division of City Hall has microfiche files of three sheets of drawings, including plans and sections, for it drawn by A. C. Hopkins, architect, of Jacksonville and dated 9/6/35. At an unknown date, the baptismal font, lecterns, railings, and platform of the sacristy in the east end were removed and a temporary wooden platform installed.

B. Historical Events and Persons Associated with the Building:

History of Ahaveth Chesed Congregation: The Temple Ahaveth Chesed--the Synagogue of Loving Kindness, was founded in 1882 by Prussian-born Morris A. Dzialnynski, then mayor of Jacksonville. The original congregation consisting of twenty-four families, was chartered by the Legislature of the State of Florida, making it the second oldest Jewish congregation in Florida, the oldest being Temple Beth El in Pensacola, founded in 1878 (Ward).

Rabbi Marx Moses led the congregation when its first temple was completed at the corner of Laura and Union Streets in 1882.

When this structure was destroyed in the Great Fire, the congregation built the new temple on the same site, making it the first of the burned houses of worship to be rebuilt when it was completed on January 20, 1901 (Ward). The small band "of the more prominent Hebrews of the city (Davis, p. 410) soon grew too large to be accommodated by this sanctuary and sold it to the Christian Scientists, building a new edifice at the southeast corner of Laura and Ashley St. in 1908-9 (Davis, p. 410). The congregation continued to grow and to migrate to Riverside, prompting the building of a fourth synyogue at St. Johns and Mallory St. in 1950. Most of the current membership resides in Southside, where the fifth temple on San Jose Boulevard is planned (Ward).

The director of the American Jewish Archives at Hebrew Union College in Cincinnati, Ohio, Dr. Jacob R. Marcus, has written of the Congregation:

Temple Ahaveth Chesed has been the dignified harbinger of liberal Judaism in a great state. It has constantly and consistently fought for a philosophy of Judaism which is rational and ethical, yet firmly rooted in the heroic traditions of a millennial faith. And if this faith has made its mark on Florida citizenry--Jew and Gentile--it is in no small sense due to the devoted rabbis of Ahaveth Chesed who have at all times given it exemplary leadership (Ward).

History of the Sanctuary: The sanctuary passed from the hands of the Christian Scientists for \$20,000 to St. John's Greek Orthodox congregation in 1919. This group occupied the building the longest, until 1968, when the St. John Divine Cathedral in Arlington was built (Anixithiria Ceremonies Pamphlet). Most recently, the sanctuary was occupied by a black minority sect before being taken over by The Metropolitan Community congregation ca. 1973 (Slappey interview). This sect was started in 1968 in Los Angeles by Troy Peery, author of The Lord Is My Shepherd, He Knows I'm Gay. Reportedly the fastest growing new denomination, The Metropolitan Community has as its special mission to minister to homosexuals ostracized by other congregations. Derived from traditional Christian tenets, its purpose is to meld denominations, races, and hetero- and homo-sexuals into one congregation believing in Harmony and Love (Slappey interview).

C. Sources of Information:

1. Old Views: The Florida Times-Union Photographic Files contain a view of the west elevation taken ca. 1904, showing pendants surmounting the wooden towers; located in the library of the Florida Publishing Co. Building, 1 Riverside Avenue, Jacksonville.

2. Original and Unpublished Sources:

- (a) Plat books are situated in the Title and Trust Co. of Florida, 200 East Forsyth Street, Jacksonville.
- (b) Abstracts of title searches researched by The Realty Title and Trust Co. in 1908 and The Florida Abstract and Title Insurance Co. in 1922 are contained in the "Parish Jurisdiction" Files of the Oriental Greek Orthodox Congregation, in the basement of their former church, 723 Laura Street, Jacksonville.
- (c) Interviews: Rev. Woodruff Slappey, 723 Laura Street, Jacksonville, 7/25/75; concerning alterations to the building and the history of the Metropolitan Community Church.

3. Bibliography:

Anon., "Anixithiria Ceremonies of St. John the Divine Greek Orthodox Church, Jacksonville, Florida, March 3, 1968", (Pamphlet from Church Office).

Davis, T. Frederick. History of Jacksonville, Florida and Vicinity, 1513-1924. St. Augustine: The Florida Historical Society and The Record Co., 1925.

Ward, James R., "Temple to Mark Ninetieth Anniversary", Times-Union and Journal, Jacksonville, January 30, 1972, A-19:1

Prepared by: Carolyn J. Hamm
Historian
Historic American
Buildings Survey
Jacksonville, Florida
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PART II. ARCHITECTURAL INFORMATION

A. General Statement:

- 1. A small house of worship combining Near Eastern and Greek Revival influences, featuring onion-form domes, stylized floral forms in stained glass, classical trim, pressed tin ceiling, C. 1901.

2. Condition of fabric: Good, but in need of repair to stained glass wooden trim, interiors.
3. Overall dimensions: 38' - 4" x 70' - 2", Rear addition: W 44' - 7' x 18' - 6". Rectangle or truncated Latin cross, three facades, one story.
4. Foundation: Reputedly built on foundations of earlier frame synyogue, destroyed in 1901 fire. Brick.
5. Wall construction. Finish and color:. Brick, now painted white. Contrasting trim and quoins.
6. Structural system. Framing. Brick bearing walls, 2x10 joists on 8x8 longitudinal beams. Charred beams in basement under chancel reported to be remnants of earlier building which was destroyed by fire in 1901.
7. Porches, stoops, bulkheads, etc. Twin entries: North and south sides of facade. North entry, exterior stairs (added).
8. Chimneys: None.
9. Openings: Doorways and doors. Narthex: Double entries from facade to two vestibules.
Facade center (narthex): Equilateral arch with rosette over four part ogee windows with engaged corinthian wooden column mullions.
10. Windows and shutters: Rectangular openings. Leaded windows: Translucent squares with border of emerald columns, gold doric capitols; multi-foil arch of ruby glass. Lower third of window turquoise and gold quatrefoil and floral motif.
11. Roof, shape covering: Gable roof with twin domes. Terne plate sheet metal shingles.
12. Cornice, eaves: Projecting bracketed eaves.
13. Dormers, cupolas, towers: Twin onion-type domes in ogival (reverse curve) form, originally had finials. Rectangular cornice molding and projecting eave on domes.
14. Floor plan: Rectangular sanctuary with vestibules flanking narthex. Truncated transepts and sacristy at chancel. Partial basement below chancel (storage and restrooms). Addition to rear with office and meeting room.
15. Stairways: Exterior stairs added, north side.

16. Wall and ceiling finish: Painted plaster walls; pressed tin coffered ceiling, cavetto cornice with overall lozenge pattern in borders, plus 18" coffered panels with egg and dart.
17. Doorways and doors: Rectilinear framing treatment with deep cornice, crown mold and panelled stiles at doorways and windows.
18. Special decorative features: Rectilinear niche with equilateral arch at east end of chancel. Original chancel, altar, etc., now removed. Standard pews.
19. Notable hardware: None
20. Mechanical equipment: Now removed nine tier brass chandelier reputed to have hung from central metal egg and dart rosette.

B.

Site:

1. Corner of Laura and Union Streets, flanked by parking lot and adjacent building.
2. Historic landscape design: None.
3. Outbuildings: New additions to rear.

PART III PROJECT INFORMATION

This project was undertaken by the Historic American Buildings Survey in cooperation with the Florida Bicentennial Commission and the Jacksonville Historical and Cultural Conservation Commission, under the direction of John Poppeliers, Chief of HABS, at the HABS Field Office, Riverside, Jacksonville, Florida, by Susan Tate (University of Florida), project supervisor; Frederick Wiedenmann (University of Florida), architect; Carolyn Hamm (Cornell University), project historian; and student assistant architects Robert Moje (University of Virginia), Ruthie Wiley (Mississippi State University), and Robert Wiltse (Louisiana State University).